why didn't you stop me

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by orphan_account

Summary

after charlie gets expelled, he decides to seize the day, and tell knox how he feels, before it's too late.

Notes

hey guys! back with another angst fic. i really hope you enjoy!!

[general warning for blood mention and themes of internalised homophobia (but not too bad dw)]

See the end of the work for more notes

Knox Overstreet hadn't been able to eat or sleep since the incident. He kept on playing it over and over in his head; Charlie's fist meeting Cameron's face, the blood, the stunned silence. And somehow worst of all, Cameron's threat.

"You just signed your expulsion papers, Nuwanda.*"*

His stomach was doing odd flips as the thought of losing another best friend. He felt sick if he let his mind linger on anything other than his footsteps on the cool stone floor as he paced up and down, up and down inside of the study room. Todd sat mutely in the corner, face pale, eyes glassy. Meeks looked as if he wanted to reach out to the boy to comfort him, but Todd had barely said a word to any of them since the fight. And since Neil died.

Thinking the words made Knox pause for the first time that day. Neil was dead. It was a fact, and yet it felt so sickeningly surreal that if he closed his eyes, he could pretend it was just a bad dream. He could pretend that Neil was sat in his dorm, struggling with his math homework, and that Todd was laughing at him.

But the thick silence in the once buzzing study room made it impossible to forget.

The sound of the door opening snapped Knox out of his reverie as he quickly looked up to see Charlie enter the room. Everyone stared at him, waiting for some clue as to how his meeting with Nolan had gone.

Charlie wouldn't meet anyone's gaze as he leaned on the door frame, hands in pockets, deep circles beneath his eyes. Knox knew before he even said the words…. He knew, and yet he still held onto that sliver of hope-

"I leave tomorrow."

Knox's chest tightened. He stood numbly staring at his friend, a mere shadow of the bright, sarcastic person he used to be. He heard Todd inhale sharply behind him, but was too focused on Charlie's blank expression to say anything.

The shocked silence continued for what felt like forever, before Charlie murmured a weak "Excuse me," and turned on his heel. Knox tried to process what had just happened, before quickly running after him.

“Charlie! Charlie, wait!”

But the other boy was walking so fast that he seemed to be on the verge of running, not bothering to look behind him. Knox hurried to catch up, ending up outside in the frosty air.

“Charlie!” He finally reached him, placing a hand on his shoulder and whirling him around to face him. Charlie still refused to look at Knox, but he wouldn’t let him escape the conversation that easily. “What the hell happened in Nolan’s office?”

It was so cold that no one else was in the courtyard, no one else to hear the panic in Knox’s voice, or the surprising tremble in Charlie’s as he bit back, “Nothing! Nothing. Just two hours of lectures and telling me why I had to leave – and how ‘lucky’ I was that they weren’t pressing charges.”

“This is bullshit,” Knox said breathlessly. “They can’t—”

“They can. And they have.” Tears sprang to Charlie’s eyes – he tried to blink them away, but they ran down his cheeks quickly.

This wasn’t right. Knox had rarely seen Charlie cry – his tears were usually reserved for laughter. The night of Neil’s death was one of the few times he’d witnessed Charlie show his emotions, and even then, Knox could sense that he was bottling it up.

For Todd. They had all agreed to try and be strong for Todd, knowing what Neil was to him… but it was too much to ask, especially of Charlie.

“It’s okay, we can – we can fix this, we’ll—”

“No, God, it’s too late, Knox. My father will be here in the morning.”

Charlie finally met Knox’s eyes. Knox could see that all hope was gone – that mischievous sparkle in his eye was replaced with something duller. And for a moment, he thought, softer. Contemplative. Knox absent-mindedly wiped away his tears with his thumb, hand cupping his face. Charlie seemed to freeze at his touch.

Charlie glance at Knox’s hand on his face, then back at Knox. That quiet reserve that had overcome Charlie over the last few days was slowly changed by a kind of resolve. He stared intently at Knox, and he didn’t know why, but his stomach fluttered at the gaze.

“I need you to forgive me.” Charlie said softly.

“What?”

“I need you to forgive me for what I’m about to do.”

“Charlie what are you talking—”

His sentence was cut off by Charlie grabbing his collar. Before he could even question what was happening, Charlie pulled Knox down to him, until their lips met – warm, warm and soft, yet hungry, as if Charlie’s life depended on this kiss and nothing else.

Knox’s mind went blank. What was happening? He must be dreaming, he was definitely dreaming. Well, he’d certainly had this dream before.

He was too focused on Charlie’s lips, Charlie’s hands now in his hair, Charlie’s warmth, to think. Slowly, he melted into the kiss, allowing himself to wrap his arms around the other boy, the thumping of his heart overwhelming him.

He wanted this moment to last forever – he wanted –

He suddenly remembered Chris’ face the night of the play. He remembered their own kiss. He remembered what she would think if she knew, he remembered that this was *wrong*, this was *bad.*

He broke away from the kiss, pushing Charlie away.

Charlie looked at him, pain flitting across his face, before he quickly shook his head in guilt. “I’m…”

Knox waited, unable to speak, before Charlie turned and left him standing alone in the cold – confused and unsure if he had imagined the entire thing.

The only sign that it was real the electricity coursing through his veins, and the warmth of his lips.

***

Hours had passed since whatever it was that had happened in the courtyard. A mixture of guilt and exhilaration swarmed his senses as he thought about it over and over and over again.

He couldn’t leave things like this – a guilty kiss in the cold, and

hundreds of words left unsaid.

It was dark when Knox finally plucked up the courage to knock on Charlie's dorm door. He didn't know what he would say. Part of him hoped that he wouldn't need to say anything, that Charlie had been joking – but another part of him hoped with all of his heart that the kiss had meant something. It had to. He'd been waiting for it for so long… but not like this.

Charlie opened the door, seemingly surprised to find Knox on the other side.

"Need help packing?" Knox asked awkwardly.

Charlie nodded stiffly, before returning to the boxes at the foot of his bed where he was carelessly dumping his belongings. Knox entered hesitantly, before getting to work folding and putting all the clothes away.

They didn't talk. This seemed to be a new theme at Welton Academy – silence.

"I'm not sorry." Charlie said finally, though still not looking at Knox.

"You shouldn't be, Cameron deserved it—"

"I mean kissing you."

"Oh." Knox knew this of course. He was just hoping to delay whatever this conversation was for as long as possible.

"I don't regret anything. I don't regret punching Cameron, and I don't regret kissing you. I only regret not doing it sooner."

"The kiss or the punch?"

Charlie huffed a laugh. "Both."

Knox gently placed down the shirt he was folding before fully turning to face Charlie. He was so close – though no closer than usual. Maybe the room had shrunk. Was that possible? Either way, Knox was even more aware of the space – or lack thereof – between them.

"We can't." Knox whispered.

"I know."

“It’s wrong.”

“I know.” A pause. “But I don’t care.”

“Charlie—”

“Look, I’ve spent too much of my life doing nothing, sitting around and letting my life pass me by. I can’t do that anymore. Not after everything that’s happened.” He reached out and grabbed Knox’s hand, running his thumb across his knuckles. “I couldn’t leave without telling you how I feel.”

“Please don’t.” Knox said, his voice shaky even to his own ears.

“Why not? I love you Knox. I love you, and I have loved you for as long as I can remember.”

Knox’s chest tightened at the words. *I love you.*It was all he had wanted to hear for years. He had thought about this moment day and night, he had thought about Charlie rejecting him, kissing him, hating him, *loving him.*

Why. Why did he have to wait so long to tell him? Why did he have to wait until Knox was finally trying to move on?

“Say you love me, too. It’s all I’ll ever ask for.”

Knox withdrew his hand from Charlie’s staring at the floor. “I can’t.”

“Because of Chris?” Knox could feel his heart break at the pain in Charlie’s voice. This was what he had wanted for years but… that was in his dreams. In his dreams it was safe. In his dreams he could dance with Charlie, and introduce him to his parents, and kiss him in the streets, and hold his hand and say everything he ever wanted to say.

But this wasn’t a dream, and none of that could ever happen.

“Because of… everything!” Knox finally stammered out.

Charlie seemed to know exactly what he meant; he stared at Knox before shaking his head. “Have you learnt nothing? Have you not been listening to Keating? *Carpe diem,* Knox, seize the day! Are you going to live the rest of your life in fear?”

“This is completely different.”

“Why, because this time it could actually *mean* something?”

“Because it’s not right! What are we going to do, sneak around our whole lives? Wait until no one’s around to – to kiss?”

“Well, I’d rather love you in secret than be with someone else. That’s all I would ever want.”

I love you. It was on the tip of Knox’s tongue. He wanted to say it. But his tongue felt like sandpaper in his mouth all of a sudden. His heart was hammering in fear. He couldn’t do this to Chris. He couldn’t do this to Charlie, force him to live a life of secrecy, no matter how badly he wanted it.

“Fine. Tell me you don’t love me.” Charlie said. “Tell me that kiss meant nothing; tell me that I disgust you, and that you hate me, and that you could never love me. Tell me you don’t love me, and you won’t have to hear from me again.”

This was unfair. This was unfair, and impossible. To say that would be to lie; the kiss meant everything, and he could never hate Charlie.

So he decided to tell the truth – or at least part of it. “I love Chris.”

And he did. Maybe he didn’t love her as much as he loved Charlie; maybe he never would – but this was for the best. This was… safe.

Charlie stared at Knox, and something within the both of them shattered.

Charlie took a deep breath, turning away from Knox, as if unable to look at him anymore.

“Okay.” He mumbled, his voice void of emotion.

“I’m sorry,” said Knox, on the verge of tears.

“I need to pack.”

Knox stood there for a moment longer, desperately wanting to take it all back, to kiss Charlie once more.

But instead, he made for the door.

“Knox?”

He stopped, filled with hope that Charlie might say something more, might see through this pitiable veil of truth, might hold him again, kiss him again, even if just for a second.

But his only words filled the room, destroying all of Knox's remaining hope.

"I hope you and Chris are happy together."

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It was the next morning, and Todd was sat alone in his dorm, as was becoming common, staring at something in his hands. Knox entered nervously, trying to take his mind off Charlie and the world beyond this small room.

"What have you got there?" Knox asked, careful not to spook the boy.

Todd silently held up a round pair of glasses, which glinted in the sunlight that poured into the dorm. Knox would recognise them anywhere.

"Oh."

"They must have forgotten them when they took his things." He twirled the glasses around in his hands. "He always looked so pretty in these. I never told him that." He pulled his glistening eyes away from the spectacles and stared at the windowsill, as if expecting Neil to be sat there laughing again.

"I think that's what I regret the most," he said. "There was so much I wanted to tell him, but I never got the chance. And now it's too late."

Knox couldn't take his eyes off of the glasses, too scared to look up and see Todd cry, too scared to break this delicate moment. But his mind was far away. His mind was fixated on Charlie's laugh. Knox had never told him how much he loved his laugh. Or the way he smirked. Or his outrageous sense of humour. He never said any of what he truly felt to Charlie.

"If I could go back in time, I would have told Neil… I would have told him everything."

I would have told him everything. The ghost of Charlie's lips haunted Knox as he thought about a life without Charlie. A life regretting not telling him anything.

Carpe diem. Seize the day.

"I'm sorry," Todd said, shaking his head, and quickly wiping away his

tears. “I guess you’ve got other stuff on your mind. How did saying goodbye to Nuwanda go?”

“I haven’t done it yet.”

“What do you mean? He’s leaving right now.”

Knox’s heart stopped. “What?”

“They’re packing the car—”

“But it’s not even eight yet,” Knox said, panic spreading through his veins. *This can’t be real.*

“His dad came early – I thought you knew.”

Shit. Shit. No.

“I – I have to go!”

Before Todd could even say another word, Knox was sprinting down the hallway, dodging other students, going as fast as his legs could carry him.

Charlie. Charlie was leaving.

“I think that’s what I regret the most,” he said. “There was so much I wanted to tell him, but I never got the chance. And now it’s too late.” Todd’s words played over and over in his head as the realisation of a life without Charlie hit him. God, he was an idiot. He was an idiot. He thought about Neil, alone in the dark of his father’s study, and he thought about Todd, alone in his room, with nothing but a pair of glasses and a broken heart.

He wouldn’t let that happen to him and Charlie. *Idiot, idiot, idiot.*

He was already out of breath as he finally reached the main entrance where the cars could park. He searched frantically for Charlie, or his car, anything. He searched and he searched and – there he was.

Sat in the back of his father’s black car, head bowed. Knox watched, heat thumping a thousand miles an hour, as the car began to pull out of the academy’s driveway.

“Charlie,” Knox shouted. “Charlie!”

But they couldn’t hear him. The car was slowly driving away, and

Knox began to sprint after them, ignoring the burning in his lungs. “Charlie, wait!” he screamed, desperation seeping into his voice.

He ran and he ran after the car, but as it began to slowly pick-up speed, leaving Knox with nothing but dust in his eyes. Out of breath, he waved his arms, helplessly praying that Charlie would see him, stop the car, run to him – anything.

But they simply drove and drove and drove, Knox shouting until his voice was hoarse and they were nothing but a dot on the horizon.

As the sickening knowledge that he was too late over came him, he let himself speak the words he had been too afraid to say his entire life.

“I love you.”

End Notes

...yeah.

this was inspired by mitski's song why didn't you stop me

also, you can find me on twt @ deadpoetlaina !! ly all <3

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